



Presentation by Crispin Moor, Director of CRC Whitehall office, to the NALC annual conference

Eastbourne - 20 May 2008

Session on parish and town councils and their work with migrant workers

The Commission for Rural Communities is a Non Departmental Public Body. Created by Parliament in 2006. And funded by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs.

Our work is about:

- Listening to and representing the views of rural communities and their representatives
- Giving expert advice and evidence; and
- Acting as an independent watchdog. Assessing whether Gov. Departments and others are meeting their commitments. For example, to Rural Proof their work.

Given our remit it is not surprising that we have been closely interested in the last few years in the phenomenon of migrant workers within many of our rural communities.

Let me outline a mix of evidence, observations, good practice. And also recommendations. And I shall be interested to hear your views and feedback.

To start with:

- Over the past four years, rural areas have experienced over 200% growth in the number of migrant workers. Over three times the growth rate for urban areas.
- There is a higher concentration of migrant workers proportionate to the local population in some rural areas than is the case in most urban areas. Such as Lincolnshire, the Wash, Yorkshire and Herefordshire.
- Many of the rural communities affected have little experience of migration.
- Also, the providers of local public services in these areas often have comparatively little experience of, and capacity for, responding to the service delivery and other challenges posed.

What are the implications of this? And what has been happening in response to this phenomenon?

Firstly, at national level, we have noted and applauded the recognition given by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion to the *rural* aspects of the challenges of migration and cohesion. We and many others worked hard to make sure that this Commission took on board the rural agenda. And it did.

And this has had knock on influences on policy and practice. Including the work of the Improvement and Development Agency and its excellent migration programme of good practice learning.

Secondly, we recognise and welcome the contribution that migrant workers make to local rural economies and communities. This was a matter my Chairman – Stuart Burgess - who is also the Government's Rural Advocate - addressed in his recent annual report to the Prime Minister.

He detailed how he had heard from rural businesses about how essential migrant workers were to them. And to the wider economy.

Their availability and their work ethic have been noted and welcomed by employers.

We are also aware that migrant workers are not always treated fairly by employers nor by society more widely. We know that there has been (shameful) exploitation of some migrant workers – denied employment rights, not being properly paid for their work, and living in unsuitable housing conditions.

And the pace of change has created some tensions for social and community cohesion. Particularly in some rural communities that have seen little change for many years.

What next? And what – in particular – might the messages be for parish and town councils?

Three types of messages – about good practice, about the needs of our local rural economies and about the role of central government.

Firstly, and most importantly, good practice exchange

Our advice to the parish and town council sector – will seem to some of you to be teaching granny to suck eggs. Nevertheless, the main point is to learn from the extensive good practice out there and get involved in delivering some of this in your own communities.

Working with the voluntary and community sectors.

The VCS – including the churches – and including and especially Citizens Advice Bureaux - are doing a great deal of support work with Migrant Workers.

Various community and support groups and networks have set up across the country and are working hard with the migrants in their community, to ensure their voices are heard and that help is at hand.

In Gloucestershire, the County Council holds a steering group where local councils and other stakeholders are embarking on some research looking into the number of migrant workers, where they're employed and what the migrants think of their local services.

By finding out what is already happening in your area, you will be able to see what has worked, what has not worked so well. And pick up and feed into local expertise.

One of the CRC/NALC Community Empowerment Award winners last year also has a good practice story of relevance.

Bishops Stortford Town Council in Hertfordshire is working with East Hertfordshire District Council to reach out to migrant worker communities and improve the support provided to them.

In particular, the opportunity has been taken to draw on skills and enthusiasm of a Polish worker employed by the Town Council in its Tourist Information Centre and Town Centre Management Office. She has helped ensure, for example, that messages to Polish people on posters are accurate and welcoming. And she has been working with East Hertfordshire council providing advice and information on issues such as housing, Council Tax and employment.

Working with local employers:

By working with those who employ migrant workers, you will be better equipped to understand the number and nature of the new community.

Often, employers have been seen in a negative light, which is often just not fair.

In fact, some employers have been working with local authorities and the voluntary and community sector to provide information to their workers – to help their workers access services and help.

For example, in Wychavon in Worcestershire the district council are working with employers to encourage community cohesion and to counter misconceived notions about migrant workers.

Local community cohesion events:

Running an event in partnership with others can be really rewarding. Not only does the existing community learn from new cultures but the new communities can learn about their area in more detail.

In addition, local authorities, including parish and town councils, can showcase the work they do and migrant workers can find out how to get involved.

In South Somerset, the Langport Area Development Trust held an international week. This included international cooking produced in local village halls, an unofficial world cup match, music and dance from overseas and traditional music and dance.

This event helped to engage migrants and their children to take part in a local event.

Parish and town councils are very well placed to be closely involved in designing and delivering these types of events.

Welcome packs:

Many local authorities are now producing welcome packs for migrant workers.

A good example is Cornwall's welcome pack which includes information such as: local information, emergency services, working in Cornwall, benefits and legal advice, children and education, health, housing, culture and leisure and money advice.

By engaging with the so called upper tier authorities parish and town councils can contribute to these local welcome pack. (Guidance on creating a welcome pack can be found at: www.idea.gov.uk .)

[The Commission for Rural Communities is a partner in the Institute of Public Policy Research's Migration and Public Services project . To secure a strong rural take on the analysis they are doing. To better understand the relationships between migration and public services in rural areas.]

Secondly, addressing the future labour needs for our rural economies

We have recommended that the Regional Development Agencies should ensure that the Regional Economic Strategies recognise the contribution of migrant workers to regional economies.

We have suggested RDAs should undertake economic risk analysis to local economies from any disruptions to the supply of migrant labour.

There is now some evidence that migrant workers are not coming to the UK in the same numbers as before. And that some workers here are now returning to their homes. For example, there are reports that Polish workers are returning to Poland as the Polish economy is growing rapidly, wage levels have been rising, and the exchange rate moves in favour of higher purchasing power in Poland.

The CRC wants to pursue this economic agenda further. We are joining the IPPR's Economics of Migration project. This project argues that an economic analysis of migration is a *useful - and missing - starting point* for policy making. The aim of the project will be to help provide this analysis.

The outcomes of our work with IPPR will be an improved understanding of the likely future economic impacts of migration on local (rural) economies. And, as a consequence, well-informed planning that identifies the measures needed to respond to such future impacts.

So it will be answering questions such as:

- Can we measure the overall impact of migrants on rural economies?
- How should policymakers manage the demand for and supply of migrants?
- Can rural economies retain the existing levels in numbers of migrant workers?
- How can migration policies best *complement* domestic skills/training initiatives?
- Assuming migrants are boosting economic growth/productivity in rural economies, how might the local domestic workforce benefit from this growth?

So, some big questions that we want evidence and answers to.

Outputs from this work will include:

- A series of Working Papers including some analyses of the implications for rural economies.
- A Roundtable event addressing specifically what migration means to rural economies.
- A 'policy handbook' that addresses the policy & practice challenges as they apply to rural as well as urban England.

We are keen to share progress on this project. And interact with a network of stakeholders. Through an informal network of Regional Development Agencies and local authorities and others.

With an explicit wish to inform those engaged in the future preparation of the new integrated regional strategies and local economic assessments.

Thirdly, what is central Government's responsibility? And what about money?

Many service providers have been arguing for the last few years that resource allocations from central government to support public services are failing to reflect the spending pressures caused by significant numbers of migrant workers entering rural – and urban – areas.

And also the spending pressures from population churning with plenty of short stay migrant workers – as well as daily urban – rural flows of migrant labour.

This all causes spending pressures.

The services affected include translation services, local authority services, education, training, police, health and maternity services and also advice and support services provided by the churches and by the voluntary and community sectors.

It is widely accepted that the ONS population data understates the number of migrants within different district areas. Resource allocation formulae are based on this type of data. Under counting means that public service providers do not receive the support from central Government to cover the costs of service adjustments and provision needed.

Tax revenues coming from migrant workers are generally accruing to central government, rather than to local government. Through income tax, national insurance contributions, VAT and also through corporation tax.

We have urged, and we continue to urge, central government to review and adjust resource allocations supporting locally delivered public services to reflect the cost pressures being faced.

We have suggested that in the meantime the Government should 'top up' and 'top slice' existing budgets allocated to service providers. To create a temporary fund. To be used to help support local services in the localities most affected.

The Local Government Association and its Chairman, Sir Simon Milton, has been making a very similar case.

Conclusion

So to summarise. As we think about the contributions, opportunities and challenges of migration in our rural communities in the future.

We need to think about helping the strength of our rural economies. We should not take an unlimited supply of migrant labour for granted.

We need to think about the capacity and ability of public service providers to provide services and to address community cohesion challenges.

And there is a responsibility on central government here to ensure that the resources are made available locally for this to happen.

And we all – including parish and town councils – need to be proactive in learning from good practice across the country. And perhaps there are some good practice examples we can share in this session and during the rest of the conference.